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Beauty in Disability: An Aesthetics for Dance and for Life

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Abstract

To what extent does dance contribute to an ideal of beauty that can enrich human quality of life? To what extent are standards of beauty predicated on an ideal human body that has no disability? In this chapter, we show how conceptions of proportionality, perfection, and ethereality from the Ancient Greeks through the 19th century can still be seen today in some kinds of dance, particularly in ballet. Disability studies and disability-inclusive dance companies, however, have started to change this. The disabled person can be beautiful, we will show, in dance and in life, under a disability aesthetics that follows Edmund Burke (1730-1797) and that suggests an alternative standard of beauty, which we call "beauty-in-experience," where beauty is perceived in the qualitative experience of abled and disabled dancers moving together in dance.

Key Words

Aesthetics, beauty, Burke, dance, disability, beauty-in-experience

Introduction: Beauty Reconsidered

Arthur C. Danto notes in his book, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (2003), that one of the great advances in the philosophy of art has been to understand that not all good art is beautiful. He cites Henri Matisse's painting *Blue Nude* (1907) as a case in point (p. 36). He also says, however, that:

> … beauty is the only one of the aesthetic qualities that is also a value, like truth and goodness. It is not simply among the values we live by, but one of the values that defines what a fully human life means. (p. 15)

In *On Beauty and Being Just*, Elaine Scarry (1999) also points to Matisse's paintings as examples that expand the capacity of our minds to change and accommodate new forms of beauty (pp. 46-47). Scarry also credits Matisse for showing us how beautiful persons or things lead the perceiver "to a more capacious regard for the world" (p. 48). Like Danto and Scarry, rather than claiming that beauty is an outmoded idea, we hold to the need for this important concept.

This chapter is an attempt to reconsider the idea of beauty in a way that broadens it to include the possibility that there can be beauty in disability when the perceiver learns to expand their regard for the world through dance-based and other social interactions with disabled persons. This broadening is not a watering-down of the idea of beauty, but rather an enriching of it in a way that is true to what is happening in both dance and in non-dance life. In reconsidering beauty, we will first look to the historical origins of the dominant contemporary understanding of beauty. From there we will show how historical accounts of beauty can be traced through developments in dance history in connection with finding beauty in the dancing human body. Finally, we will show how experiencing beauty through contemporary dance expands both the idea of beauty and the quality of life by leading us to greater mutuality with others who exist with us in the world (see Albrecht and Devlieger, 1999). In short, disabled dance allows us greater access, via experience and interactive communication with others who are different from us, to both beauty and an expanded quality of life.

In the history of aesthetics, ugliness and bodily deformity were linked. Eighteenth-century philosophers and thinkers such as the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson and David Hume suggested that bodily deformity could not be beautiful. In contrast to these thinkers, Edmund Burke (1730-1797) provides a model in which perfection or proportion were not necessary for beauty. In this chapter, we propose a perspective on beauty-in-experience rather than a classical or neo-classical conception of beauty in which perfection or proportion are necessary. Our view of beauty builds from a Burkean perceptual model rather than a Kantian judgment model.

When a human being encounters another human, an animal or plant, a work of art, or a natural scene, a certain feeling is conveyed between the object and the perceiver. What is at work behind such perception? What does the body have to do with such experiences? A present-day philosopher, Roger Scruton (2009) sets up this problem under the term "judgment" (after Kant), suggesting that what matters is a judgment of taste "for which the technical term 'aesthetic' is now in common use" (p. 17). Unlike Scruton, the Burkean perceptual model might describe beauty in biological or evolutionary terms *avant la lettre*, where a certain experience of bodily features like webs, wings, breasts, hips or muscular tone create a perception of beauty. As we will see, this perceptual model is not clearly tied to a judgment or rational claim about the object being perceived.

Classical Beauty

The classical ideal for beauty appears in both its Ancient Greek and European (Renaissance through 19th century) versions. In short, this idea held that the standard for beauty is one of harmony, symmetry, and proportion, and that this form of beauty imitates or is found in the perfection of the gods or of the universe. This latter line of reasoning (usually associated with

German philosophy of the 18th century) regards perfection as the basis of beauty. Following Leibniz, Moses Mendelssohn defined beauty as an intellectual (and thus rational) perfection of an object (see Hochman, 2014, p. 39f.; Bourke, 2015, p. 133ff.). Although written in a literary form, Mendelssohn's (1761) *Letters on Sentiments* is an important discussion of this issue at the very origin of aesthetics as a discipline (Mendelssohn, 1997). The principal contrast in this text is between sensual perfection and rational perfection. Two of the characters of this dialogue stand for each of these ways of interpreting beauty: Euphranor supports a sensual (English) perception of beauty and Theocles the intellectual (German) perception.

Ancient Greek Beauty

Proportionality, a classical ideal, concerns ratios, numbers, and a beautiful form. Basing beauty on proportionality tends to exclude any element of feeling or property of the mind. From Plato to Shaftesbury, beauty primarily concerns the property of an object that is symmetrical and orderly—with proper mathematical ratios. For the Greeks, beauty is not an autonomous field of inquiry nor is it primarily applied to art. Instead, for Plato, beauty concerns *eros*, the desire for something lacking in oneself (Hyland, 2008; Kraut, 2008). The important point for Plato (and Neoplatonism) is how *auto to kalon*, "beauty itself," is a perfect and eternal form unchangeable and divorced from bodies. Eros is meant to lead us to this perfect form. We can begin to see how much this conception of beauty has changed since the Renaissance.

Ancient Greek Beauty and the Origin of Ballet. Owen Smith (2005) points out that the classical standard for Western theatre dance has long been the Apollonian model of corporeal harmony, proportion and verticality. Indeed, Jennifer Homans' (2010) book on the history of ballet is titled *Apollo's Angels*. There Homans points out that Gaetan Vestris was known as "the god of the dance" for having a body that approximated the Apollonian ideal, with a "long, lean,

elegantly apportioned body with physical stature and beauty" (pp. 26-27). Ballet is one of the main vehicles for the classical ideal of the body (Novack, 1993).

Ballet's aesthetic values derived from Ancient Greece show a Platonic as well as an Apollonian ideal for beauty. When Catherine De Medici married Henri II she brought ballet to France from Florence, after which it was developed by the French monarchies in order to combine their Christian beliefs, which included a body-transcendent love of God, with the ideal, Platonic world of the forms (Homans, 2010, pp. 3-6). Their Neoplatonic idea was to reveal God and His secret, ideal realm by shifting their attention away from passions and physical desire and towards the beauty of number, proportion, and design (p. 6).

Classical ballet has had a profound influence on the development of Western theatre dance overall, including its idea of beauty. Petra Kuppers (2000) observes that ballet is often cited by dance biographers as the form of dance that initially attracted their imagination and that this has an effect on their idea of the "dancerly body" as one that is "perfect" or "ideal" in a classical way (pp. 122-123).

Neo-Classical Beauty

In Western culture and in the ballet that became part of that culture, the idea of beauty progressed and developed from a classical to a neo-classical standard over time, one that changed the idea of beauty in classical proportionality to one that included fitness for function. Anticipating evolutionary theory of the 19th century, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) speaks of a spider and a fly in the following way: "The heedless flight, weak frame and tender body of this [fly] fits and determines him as much a prey as the rough make, watchfulness and cunning of the [spider] fits him for rapine and the ensnaring part" (Shaftesbury, 1997, pp. 18-19). The important point for Shaftesbury is that there is a structural analogy between species, but also

between limbs and organs. “And in the structure of each of these animals,” he notes, “there is as apparent and perfect a relation to the other as, in our own bodies, there is a relation of limbs and organs or as, in the branches or leaves of a tree, we see a relation to each other and all, in common, to one root and trunk” (p. 168). In neo-classical beauty, the function of the organ or body as it relates to the whole becomes part of the thinking at the origin of aesthetics in a manner that, at the time, had not previously been emphasized.

Neo-Classical Beauty in Aristocratic Europe and Ballet. The purpose of classical ballet, as taught in the French Académie Royale de Musique et de Danse, established by Louis XIV in 1661, was to teach noblemen the bearing, carriage, posture, and grace that befitted the aristocratic class in Western Europe (Homans, 2010; Smith, 2005). This was part of a trend across Europe during Shaftesbury’s time in which aesthetics as a discipline was born (Klein, 2004; Vermeir & Deckard, 2012). Classical ballet sought to teach this comportment not only as an aesthetic property to be experienced as pleasing or beautiful, but to include the moral quality of how one should conduct oneself in society. Thus beauty in ballet, from its inception, included both the aesthetic property of beauty and the idea of beauty as a human ethical value. The standard for the posture and type of body that was best for ballet can be seen in Leonardo da Vinci’s geometrical drawing of *The Vitruvian Man* (1490) man (see photo insert below), where the ideal body was taken to reflect universal laws of nature, proportion and harmony (Homans, 2010, p. 134).

[*Insert Leonardo da Vinci *The Vitruvian Man* photo]

Nineteenth-century Romanticism gave rise to the ballerina as female and sylph, with Marie Taglioni being admired both for encapsulating this ethereal ideal as well as for her “bourgeois propriety” (see Homans photo inserts following 134). Indeed, the development of

pointe shoes increased both the line of the ballerina's leg and elevated her towards the heavens. Homans notes that Taglioni's foot on pointe was even an object of romantic fantasy (p. 141). It is this balletic aesthetic of beautiful ethereality, what Petra Kuppers (2000) calls "the form's insistence on lightness and immateriality," that creates the "hypervisibility" of the disabled body, since what does not fit with this ideal is thrown into high relief (p. 124). Kuppers' theory of disability will be discussed further towards the end of this chapter.

Beauty in Balanchine Ballet

George Balanchine was a direct inheritor of ballet as an aristocratic art form. Born in St. Petersburg in 1904 he learned ballet at the Imperial Ballet Theatre under the reign of Tsar Nicholas II, where he both boarded and was taught his academic subjects. He also trained as a musician at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. During the Communist revolution, the Imperial Ballet fell into disrepair and the students were often hungry and cold. Balanchine fled to Paris, where he spent a number of years dancing and choreographing ballets for various dance troupes. Lincoln Kirstein discovered Balanchine at Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* and brought him to America in 1933. Together they founded the New York City Ballet (NYCB) (Volkov, 1985, pp. 111-112). The NYCB arguably reached its heyday in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, before Balanchine's death, a period of time following the emergence of the avant-garde movement that made beauty unnecessary for philosophy's concept of art (Danto, 2003). Philosophers and critics who declared a beauty crisis in art could not have been those in the audience who were in the thrall of a Balanchine ballet (pp. 14, 26).

The beauty of Balanchine ballet is classical in many aspects even though Balanchine called his style "neo-classical ballet" to distinguish it from older classical styles like Enrico Cecchetti's. His ballets contain order, unexpectedness, inevitability, economy (Euclid and

Pythagoras according to Osborne, 1984, p. 295), and "coherent harmoniousness" with music under a unifying Idea (Plotinus: 34-36). This classicism is particularly in evidence in the ballets he created with Igor Stravinsky, a composer who acknowledged "a profound admiration for classical ballet, which in its very essence, by the beauty of its *ordonnance* [arrangement of elements] and the aristocratic austerity of its forms … represents the triumph of the studied conception over vagueness, of the rule over the arbitrary, of order over the haphazard" (Stravinsky: 99-100). Stravinsky noted that for *Apollo* Balanchine designed "groups, movements, and lines of great dignity and plastic elegance as inspired by the beauty of classical forms" (143). Indeed, in classical philosophers like Plotinus (1964) we find "the beauty [that] craftsmanship confers upon a house … and all its parts" (p. 36). Balanchine ballet might also be said to commune "with the intelligible realm" by its ability to be appreciated with the "faculty that is peculiarly sensitive to this beauty" and then judged in accordance with that faculty's "own inner Idea, which it uses as a canon of accuracy" (p. 36.).

[*Insert NYCB *Apollo* photo]

Towards Beauty-in-Experience

In this section we discuss the philosophical background to our reconsidered standard of beauty—one that treats what we will here call "beauty-in-experience" as a development of, rather than departure from, conceptions of beauty that are found in Western philosophical aesthetics. We show how Edmund Burke's 18th-century philosophy, for example, can provide a connecting link between traditional, perfection- and fitness-based standards of beauty and the contemporary idea of beauty-in-experience that is being developed by disability studies and disability-integrated dance companies.

A Burkean Theory

Edmund Burke (1730-1797) questioned many of his culture's deeply held beliefs about beauty—in particular its having to be perfect or proportionate. Interpreters have not taken his view of beauty seriously, though, because of his gendered categories, and some of this hesitation may be justified. However, this chapter aims to defend a Burke-inspired experiential account of the *origin* of our ideas of the beautiful. Fundamentally, at the level of efficient cause, beauty refers to a corporeal relaxation rather than a tension (as in the sublime).

While the English and the Scots upheld a theory of beauty based in proportionality and fitness, and the Germans one of intellectual perfection, the French constructed theories of beauty on more subjective matters, such as that of taste (*goût*) (Vermeir & Deckard, 2012). Burke is best read within a culture (as an Irishman in Great Britain) in which nerves and sensibilities as well as mores and manners become part of the philosophical vocabulary. Whereas the 17th century focused on the rationality of passion, the 18th century, and Burke in particular, speak in terms of bodily sensibility and experience. Following John Locke, who was a medical doctor, but also Richard Brocklesby's (1722–1797) experiments on animals, Sarafianos (2005) explains that,

> [Brocklesby's] research produced a new anatomical map … skin, nerves, and innervated parts were sensitive but motionless, while muscle fibers and membranes were insensible but moving …. Th[e] integrated perception of sensibility as a universal and omnipotent phenomenon of the body provides an immediate connection between Burke's *Enquiry* and later manifestations of vitalist thinking. (p. 63)

Burke's experiential theory of beauty is described here in anatomical, psychological and neuro-physiological terms, and as Sarafianos notes, this is a new way of describing the body. This medical background provides useful distinctions for our analysis. In looking specifically to dance, something Burke does not write about, we apply his theory of tensed nerves and relaxed solids—

simply speaking, whether the body of the viewer is experienced as tense or relaxed—in a way that has not been done before.

In part I, section X, of *Philosophical Enquiry*, "Of Beauty," animals are treated as incapable of the sense for beauty as they are interested in sex only as a means of reproduction. "But man," Burke (2015/1757) writes, "who is a creature adapted to a greater variety and intricacy of relation, connects with the general passion, the idea of some *social* qualities, which direct and heighten the appetite which he has in common with all other animals" (p. 67). This social quality applies to both genders equally and is the very basis of beauty in human nature. "I call beauty a social quality; for where women and men, and not only they, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them, (and there are many that do so) they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons" (p. 67).

The most significant criticism of Burke concerns his theory in which beauty is feminine and the sublime is masculine—this is viewed as too gendered (O'Neill, 2007). Here is the crucial and controversial passage:

> This quality [of beauty], where it is highest in the female sex, almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection. Women are very sensible of this, for which reason, they learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, and even sickness. In all this, they are guided by nature. Beauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty. (p. 88)

This passage needs to be taken in its socio-historical context. Burke's is not a normative claim regarding *how* women *should* act, but rather it is describing an empirical example to support the claim that, "the appearance of beauty effectually causes some degree of love in us, as the application of ice or fire produces the ideas of heat or cold" (p. 74). While Burke would have

agreed with Shaftesbury's (1997/1711) claim that "it is not merely what we call *principle* but a *taste* which governs men," he contrasts Shaftesbury's neo-classical (and aristocratic) claim that "if in the way of polite pleasure the study and love of beauty be essential, the study and love of symmetry and order, on which beauty depends, must also be essential in the same respect" (p. 414). The perception of weakness is thus tied to beauty, which in the 18th century was connected to feminine mores.

It is thus in the context of mixed sentiments (Burke, 2015/1757, Ch. III) combined with the rise of the aesthetic in Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Shaftesbury, among others, that a culture of taste and manners contributed to a deepening in the contrast between beauty and ugliness, or fitness and deformity (Hochman, 2014; Bourke, 2015, ch. 3). To situate Burke within this 18th-century context is to make a claim about beauty and disability that recovers beauty as a perceptual quality in place of a rational conceptual relation. What is it in this time of the rise of aesthetics that shifts the language from reason to feelings such that "abnormal" bodies may now be perceived anew? Later in the 19th century, romantic notions of beauty take over and, as Danto (2003) and Scarry (1999) have pointed out, by the time of the 20th century, the ideals of the beautiful had all but died out. Philosophical definitions had eclipsed the Platonic origins of *eros* and love, and as Deckard (2011) has shown, Burke is interpreting Plato's love (and beauty) in terms of *philia* rather than *eros*. But in reconsidering beauty, the Burkean lens is a fruitful one through which to view contemporary dance, a form of dance developed from modern dance that offers dancers and audiences the opportunity to feel beauty by experiencing the ways that non-idealized bodies can move in ways that are afforded to them.

Burkean Application

The fundamental question underlying a rejection of the neo-classical in favor of a beauty-in-experience perspective is the following: What is it that makes a body attractive in perceiving it? While there are other possible angles, let us take two possibilities here: size and shape, and movement. Since the background of Burke's theory in particular is partly medical, with respect to nerves and the efficient cause already mentioned, we will attempt this application before turning to dance.

What might the difference in size and shape of human bodies say about our perceptions of beauty? Here is one passage from Burke (2015/1757): "The neck, they say, in beautiful bodies should measure half the calf of the leg; it should likewise be twice the circumference of the wrist" (p. 78). According to Burke, as much as proportion and perfection had to be true of attractive bodies, it can just as likely be true of ugly bodies. He continues,

> You may assign any proportions you please to every part of the human body; and I undertake, that a painter shall religiously observe them all, and notwithstanding produce if he pleases, a very ugly figure. The same painter shall considerably deviate from these proportions, and produce a very beautiful one. (p. 78)

He says the same of sculpture before turning to the male and female body:

> Consider how much difference there is between the measures that prevail in many similar parts of the body, in the two sexes of this single species only. If you assign any determinate proportions to the limbs of a man, and if you limit human beauty to these proportions, when you find a woman who differs in the make and measures of almost every part, you must conclude her not to be beautiful in spite of the suggestions of your imagination; or in obedience to your imagination you must renounce your rules; you must lay by the scale and compass, and look out for some other cause of beauty. For if beauty

> be attached to certain measures which operate from a principle in nature, why should similar parts with different measures of proportion be found to have beauty, and this too in the very same species? But to open our view a little, it is worth observing, that almost all animals have parts of very much the same nature, and destined nearly to the same purposes; an head, neck, body, feet, eyes, ears, nose and mouth; yet Providence...has worked out of these few and similar organs, and members, a diversity hardly short of infinite in their disposition, measures, and relation. (p. 79)

This long passage is quite remarkable, since Burke is critiquing a long tradition of proportion when it comes to size and shape, predicting an evolutionary standard—the animal kingdom (including humans) have different shapes and sizes and even some of the same "features" as humans.

Again, what makes a body disproportionate? Are there dancers' bodies that are attractive, but not proportionate according to a classical ideal? According to Burke, it is not a mathematical proportion or rational perfection that makes one attractive. Some may have perfect proportionality and not be attractive and some may have imperfect proportions and be very attractive. Thus, the size and shape of a body may have to do with beauty according to a "principle in nature," but it is not pure mathematical relations that evoke the feeling of beauty. Furthermore, this is not a static standard, but rather can be adapted by different perceivers, of both classical and contemporary dance, including dance that includes disabled dancers. We turn now to a discussion of how disability studies suggest that we can learn to perceive differently through alteration of experience.

The Contribution of Disability Studies

Disability studies go further than does Burke in suggesting that beauty is more than the perception of an ideally proportioned object or body, thereby adding a great deal to how we might claim beauty as something that can appear in disability, in both dance and in non-dance life. In the sections below we discuss the ways that disability studies, and the incorporation of some of its tenets (such as the social concept of disability to be discussed below) by the danceworld, has contributed to this broader concept of beauty.

The Social vs. Medical Model of Disability

We will use Petra Kuppers' view of the social model of disability to frame the discussion in the rest of this chapter. Kuppers (2003, 2011, 2014) explains that *disability* is a discursive construct that lies within the interaction between the person with atypical biology and the social environment, where a person is only labeled "disabled" when they cannot function adequately within dominant social structures and norms (see also Herman & Chatfield, 2010). If a public building is only accessible via a flight of stairs with no ramp, for example, a person who needs to use a wheelchair for access to the building will then encounter an obstacle that will signal their "disability". This locates disability in the social landscape rather than in the differently-abled person. In a world with sufficient ramps, for example, the person using a wheelchair is not disabled; there is just a diversity of persons who can function in society, those who use legs and those who use wheels.

The contrasting model is "the medical model of disability," where the medical world sets the standard for "normal" biology. "Normal" might be a person with two legs, two arms, vision and hearing ability who can achieve certain tasks, etc., the standard for vision being 20-20. This model would locate any departure from this norm in the biology of the person who does not meet it (Kuppers, 2000, 2014; Herman & Chatfield, 2010). Kuppers (2014) credits this medical model

of disability with either creating or being part of the discriminatory social phenomenon known as "ableism", in which the disabled person is characterized as inferior or in need of change (pp. 23-24; Zitomer & Reid, 2011). Shelley Tremain (2015) links Foucault's idea of biopower or biopolitics to disability studies. Understanding the dichotomy of "abled" and "disabled" as a function of normative regimes and values, which we have claimed might follow historically from a Burkean concept of beauty, paves the way for disability-inclusive dance to be beautiful in a way that increases the quality of life for those who experience this dance through bringing us into greater connection with and understanding of the movement qualities of differently-abled human beings.

Disability-Inclusive Dance's Contribution

As shown above, classical and neo-classical ideals of beauty are still alive in ballet companies like the NYCB. The disability-inclusive dance on which this chapter will now focus has developed out of the contemporary dance tradition. Contemporary dance in the 1960s and '70s, like its precursor, modern dance, sought to counter the European, aristocratic ballet tradition by experimenting with new movement styles that explicitly connected with emerging social ideas and widened the idea of how a beautiful dance body should look (Novack, 1990). (Remember here that Burke allowed social ideas to affect our experience of beauty.) Dancers no longer had to be princes and princesses with elongated bodies made longer by thinness and pointe shoes. Dancers could now have bodies with strength and weight, and they could perform guttural and grounded movements in bare feet. Modern and contemporary dance companies opened the door to disability-inclusive companies by allowing dance to establish its own codes for movement, and for who could perform that movement, that were no longer tied to aristocratic norms (Anderson, 2008).

In recent years many forms of dance, including ballet, have tried to expand their audiences and respond to social pressures for inclusiveness by incorporating disabled dancers. The number of international dance companies and organizations that feature either all disabled dancers or are integrated or disability inclusive include (in alphabetical order and in addition to the ones we will describe more fully below) Ability Unlimited (India), Adugna Potentials (Ethiopia), AMICI (U.K.), Blue Eyed Soul (U.K.), Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels (U.S.), Dance Integrated (Australia), Danza Sin Limites, (Argentina), Disabled People's Performing Art Troupe (China), Diverse Dance (Canada), Genesis of Entertainment (Japan), Grupo Alma (Argentina), Grupo Pulsar (Brazil), HandiCapace Tanz Kompanie (Germany), Infinite Flow (U.S.), Infinity Dance Theatre (U.S.), Le Ballets C. de la B (Belgium), Light Motion (U.S.), Mobility Junction (U.S.), MoMo Dance Theatre (Canada), Motion House (U.K.), Núcleo Dança Aberta (Brazil), Oiseau Mouche (France), Paradox Dance (U.S.), Remix Dance Project (South Africa), Stop Gap (U.K.), The Dance Laboratory (Norway), Tokounou Dance Company (U.S.), Touch Compass Dance Trust (New Zealand), Vertigo Dance Company (Israel), and Wheelchair Dance Project (Turkey). Below, we briefly describe various approaches to dance and disability represented or pioneered by several dance companies, in particular Candoco (U.K.), AXIS Dance Company (U.S.), and DanceAbility (U.S.), all contemporary companies that use a social model of disability to inform their work.

AXIS Dance Company, Candoco, and DanceAbility

AXIS Dance Company (started in 1987 in Oakland, California) was one of the first contemporary dance companies to help pave the way for integrated and mixed-ability dance worldwide. Integrated dance exists where the contributions and movement styles of all dance participants, those with and without physical or mental impairments, are given equal weight

(Benjamin, 2002). Like other integrated and mixed-ability companies and programs, AXIS includes contact improvisation as a method for sharing and engaging differently-abled persons' experience of movement and dance. Davies (2008) describes one dancer's experience of exploring contact-improvisation based techniques with AXIS and choreographers Bill T. Jones and Stephen Petronio. Contact improvisation was initiated by Steve Paxton in the early 1970s. In this heuristic method, improvising dancers are joined through ever-changing points of contact that enable them to move together and to share and shift weight and energy from one person to another (Pallant, 2006).

[*Insert AXIS photo]

Founded in London in 1991, Candoco (named to place focus on what differently abled bodies *can* rather than *cannot* do) was the first professional touring company to integrate differently-abled dancers in Europe employing both contact improvisation and Graham-based techniques (Benjamin, 2002). Adam Benjamin began Candoco with Celeste Dandeker, a former professional dancer with London Contemporary Dance Theatre who was injured onstage, leaving her with little ability to move her legs. They wanted to explore a form of dance that incorporated Dandeker's new way of moving in a wheelchair (p. 4).

Beginning with what a non-standard body *can* do initiates dance training, movement, and choreography development from the vantage point of a body who is already different from an Apollo or a sylph. As noted above, this development was potentiated by early modern dancers' rejection of traditional ballet standards at the beginning of the 20th century. Such an approach opens up the possibility that the graceful flow of a wheelchair moving seamlessly across stage or the staccato movement of a person with tremors due to Parkinson's might be perceived and termed "beautiful" along neo-Burkean lines.

[*Insert Candoco photo]

DanceAbility International is an organization devoted to training teachers how to teach mixed-ability dance classes. It was founded by Alito Alessi in Eugene, Oregon in the late 1980s. Among other principles, DanceAbility holds that everyone should be able to dance (that dance is not for medically-termed "fit" or classical bodies only) and that dance has the social ability to breakdown prejudices (Herman & Chatfield, 2010). Here, dance education is acknowledged to affect not just the danceworld but non-dance life as well.

[*Insert DanceAbility photo(s)]

These innovators in dance and disability, among many others, instantiate a social model of disability through the medium and mode of dance. By doing so they are not just expressing the value of inclusiveness but showing through performance that beauty may be perceived in dance and in dancers performing with non-classical bodies, capabilities, and movement styles. As Benjamin (1993) stated:

> If contemporary arts and contemporary dance in particular is to reflect contemporary society, it must, just as it did when black dancers first appeared on stage in this country, open its doors and its eyes to perceive beauty and worth where it has hitherto been unable. (p. 46)

The question then becomes how the perception of the viewer might be changed so that they can see beauty where hitherto they could not.

Reconsidering Beauty as Beauty-in-Experience

We have so far discussed the various concepts of beauty, which can be listed as: classical beauty; neo-classical beauty; Burkean beauty; and beauty-in-experience. What do we mean, precisely, by beauty-in-experience? Clearly disabled dance and persons can both create and fail

to create this experience (as can able-bodied dance and persons); not every experience with disability in dance or in life is necessarily beautiful. Beauty applies where there is a perceptual experience of beauty in the viewer. To expand one's perceptual scope may require education to "see" differently. Beauty, as Burke might agree, is something one identifies when perceiving or feeling it in experience. It may be related to a sort of movement economy of the dancer's particular body or the aids the dancer is moving with (such as the efficient movement of a dancer on wheels or using crutches or "walking" on their hands if they have no legs and feet). It also includes the idea that one can experience beauty through moving and dancing either as or with a differently-abled person (such as in a class, dance, or contact improvisation exercise).

In a research study funded to examine dance students' experience of learning dance in "dance technique" classes that she conducted with her own students at Coventry University Sarah Whatley (2007) sought to give voice to disabled dancers "who can so often feel silenced through their struggle to conform to normative representations of the dancing body" (pp. 6-7). This group of 15 female students from ages 18-26, including two students who are wheelchair users, reflected and reported upon their experiences in technique classes, both verbally and in writing, over a period of nine months. Whatley also conducted research on levels of participation by disabled dance students in University dance classes across the U.K., from which 13 students of nearly 200 students identified as disabled (see pp. 8-9). As a result Whatley identified five "viewing strategies" (a term she uses following the work of Louise Kateraga and Petra Kuppers) used by dance students without disabilities to view dance performed by dance students with disabilities (p. 18). She found that these viewing strategies spanned a continuum of distant to empathic to transformative:

1. Passive Oppressive—where the viewer takes a voyeuristic stance;

2. Passive Conservative—where the viewer has internalized a classical aesthetic perspective;
3. Post-Passive—where the viewer looks to see how the disabled dancer transcends the disability;
4. Active Witness—where the viewer allows disability to open up new ways of seeing and interpreting the body in dance that includes a radical shift in aesthetic stance; and
5. Immersion—where the non-disabled viewer experiences their own "becoming" through engaging with the disabled dancer's experience in a more fully immersive way (pp. 18-20).

This framework shows how perceptions of disabled dance and disabled dancers' bodies might be changed through an interpretive mode of viewing; the viewing strategies described in 4) and 5) show how the idea of beauty might be expanded on the viewer/perceiver end to include such dancing under beauty-in-experience. In contrast, viewing strategy 1) suggests a way of viewing dance that treats the disabled person's body as "on display" as spectacle, and 2) views the disabled body with a classical aesthetic perspective. Both are experienced as alienating by the disabled dancer who is the object of this othering gaze (see pp. 18-19). Viewing strategy 3) seems to be what Ann Cooper Albright (2013) refers to in her charge that disabled-inclusive dance companies sometimes remain within a traditional representational frame, "emphasizing the elements of virtuosity and technical expertise to reaffirm a classical body in spite of its limitations" (p. 301).

In fairness, Albright also points out that in the ballet *Gypsy*, Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels extends "the aesthetic heritage of nineteenth-century Romantic ballet into several intriguing new directions" (p. 315), which presumably included movements that are organic to

wheelchair users. In addition, Albright points to contact improvisation as a promising way to achieve the immersive, experiential lens described in 5). Indeed, more than any other form of dance Albright suggests that contact improvisation differs from other methods of seeing and using disabled bodies because it succeeds in "pulling the audience in as witness to the ongoing negotiations of that [the disabled dancer's] physical experience" (p. 315).

Kuppers (2000) comments on how dance education might become better at training viewers to "see" differently. Suggestions include attending more carefully to spaces that disabled dancers have opened up through performance and complying with these performances' request that they become more aware of themselves as spectators (see pp. 126-129). Here she cites the Magpie and Retina Dance Company's 1997 performance for the London Blitz '97 festival that emphasized the company members' experiences with how they are treated as persons with learning disabilities (p. 126). She also cites performances by Bilderwerfer, a Viennese performance group that focuses on how audiences "read dance" in terms of what they believe is "natural" by disrupting these readings through the use of texts, music, glass screens, and other methods in public spaces (p. 127). This approach is one that fits with the work of Zitomer and Reid (2011), who found that children's perceptions of dance and disability change after immersion in an integrated dance program that includes children both with and without physical differences.

Beauty-in-experience includes both how beauty appears to the viewer and how it feels to participants in the dance. Introducing her book on disability culture and community performance Kuppers (2011) discusses a workshop on physically integrated dance practice led by AXIS Dance Company where the instruction was to "find a strange and twisted shape" (p. 1). At first she struggled to apply this direction. She explains,

> On the ground around me are plenty of people who live in twisted bodies, to whom the twist is not strange, but a deeply familiar way of experiencing their bodies' everyday frontality, location, or elevation while standing or sitting. (p. 1)

As the workshop went on, however, she realized that the disability-inclusive format of the workshop gave her explicit permission to:

> …translate the instructions into my own limbs, find twists that do feel strange, that stretch my bodily imaginary, that lead out of the comfort zone of my personal dancerly base-line. The category confusion passes. (p. 31)

Kuppers reconsidered "strange and twisted" in one of the ways that this chapter suggests that beauty can be reconsidered. The starting point was her own body's "dancerly base-line" and how movement *feels* rather than just how it looks. Thus, one might feel, as well as perceive, beauty.

This idea that beauty can be felt in both lived experience and in perception, not just in the viewing but in the process of "being", "becoming", or "dancing", is echoed in Sara Houston's (2015) article, "Feeling Lovely: An Examination of the Value of Beauty for People Dancing with Parkinson's." Carroll, a person with Parkinson's, remarks that an inclusive ballet class sponsored by the English National Ballet made her "feel lovely" and "beautiful again" (pp. 27-30). After considering this auto-ethnographic account along with the work of Arthur Frank, Michael Bury, Petra Kuppers, and others on the social and felt impact of disability, Houston suggests that the experience of beauty may be associated in part with the feeling of bodily control that dance provides (pp. 33-34). Further, even though guided by balletic movements, this control is not an imposition from classical ballet, but the sort of control that is relative to the person's uniquely abled body with Parkinson's or any other body-movement affecting condition or biology. This is an experiential, or organic, sort of beauty. A non-disabled person dancing in a contact

improvisation exercise with Carroll might also feel beauty through Carroll's body, carrying that experience and knowledge into other non-dance social realms where it can change new perceptions and experiences of beauty in disability.

On Keeping Beauty

In conclusion, we would like to keep the term "beauty" because we believe—with Danto, Scarry and Burke—that the experience of beauty is necessary to a full, rich, and "quality" life. It is no longer the case that only classical and neo-classical dancers are eligible for the designation of *beautiful*. Disability-inclusive and non-disability inclusive dance companies have been offering performances and workshops that demonstrate how disabled bodies can both look and feel beautiful. Our goal in this chapter has been to trace the cultural development of a theory of beauty that can account for this change or enable us to see these companies as working with traditional concepts of the beautiful beyond the classical and neo-classical. We suggest that one point of departure from the classical norm resides in Edmund Burke's philosophy, which includes social awareness as part of the grounding for experiences of beauty. Disability studies has also expanded the meaning of "cultural perception" to include awareness of how the latter can be limited by factors that are more social than aesthetically necessary. We have also noted how dance practices such as contact improvisation and dance education have helped to change experiences and perceptions of dance and of dancers who are differently-abled. Finally, we have termed this kind of beauty, one that includes disability, as beauty-in-experience, so named to include the experience of beauty in both dance and non-dance life. Beauty-in-experience allows for a more "capacious regard," as Elaine Scarry (1999) puts it, in aesthetic and everyday encounters with others (p. 48).

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